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Role of Libraries & Information Centers in Promoting Culture and Architecture in Cholistan Desert, South Punjab Pakistan

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Abstract

This study was conducted with purpose to explore the elapsed and hidden treasures of Cholistan dessert in South Punjab, Pakistan. It discusses the role of university libraries of South Punjab, museums, Pakistan National library, Pakistan Library Association and HEC, digitization centers and documentation centers. It suggests that grant must be provided for research activities in different aspects of Cholistani Culture including Tribal Folks, Art, Culture, loriyan and old songs. HEC and Punjab government should provide special funds to libraries to support endangered art and culture like Chunri, khusa, paintings, weaving, the famous puppet show of Cholistan, folk songs of Darawar and cultural theatre. New technologies like YouTube, social networking sites, Facebook, and Web 2.0. etc may be used for public awareness. This paper highlights the splendid culture and architecture of great historical value in Cholistan. The magnificent forts, glorious palaces mosques and shrines of Uch are a living testimony to the grandeur of Cholistan, in the Punjab. Cholistan has some fifty sites and forts of Harappan demeanor. Derawer is situated in a dry bed of lost river Hakra.

Keywords: Cholistan dessert, South Punjab, Arts, Culture, Forts, river Hakra, Uch, Aryan culture

The Cholistan Desert: Introduction

Cholistan is the largest of four main desserts in Pakistan UNESCO, (2009). Cholistan Desert is in the South of Bahawalpur, South Punjab, Pakistan is, locally known as Rohi which covers an area of about 16,000, square km and extends into the Thar Desert of India. The word Cholistan is derived from Cholna which means "moving". The people of Cholistan lead a semi-nomadic life, moving from one place to another in search of water and fodder for their animals. It is said that Cholistan has not always been a desert. It flowed a river between 4000 and 1000 B.C, the area was fertile and also populated as the various remain of its settlements show. All through the Punjab, North West Rajistan and Sind thee are civilization of rivers which suddenly close down to flow or changed their rout. This ancient river once irrigated Cholistan usually identified Hakra

River, known as the Saravati in Vedic times, considered sacred by the Aryans (Mares, M.A., 1999). At one time there were 400 forts in the area and archaeological finds around the Darawar Fort, the only place with a perennial waterhole, indicate that it was contemporaneous with the Indus Valley Civilization. The average annual rainfall is only 12 cm, and the little cultivation there is made possible by underground wells, drawn up by the camels. The water is stored in troughs, built by the tribes, between sand hills and in waterholes called tobas, (Auj, N., 1991).

Objectives of the Study

- To divulge information regarding Cholistani culture and architecture.
- To provide awareness about Cholistan desert's life, festivals, local, regional arts and crafts.
- To identify the possible role of libraries, information centers, documentation and survey centers for the preservation and promotion of Cholistani cultural heritage.
- To encourage and promote study and research in the field of architecture and culture

Research Methodology

This study is based on review of literature; (books, newspaper articles, research theses in the Department of Saraiki and material from the Internet were consulted. Informal interviews were conducting with intellectuals and native academicians of the area. Special information was provided by well known poet and writer, ex- programme manager Pakistan Radio, Bahawalpur station and Chairman, Department of Saraiki (a native language), the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Prof. Dr. Nasrullah Khan Nasir. Discussion with library science specialists was made in order to identify the role of libraries and information in promoting the Cholistani culture and architecture.

Uch Sharif

Uch Sharif, is 75 km away from Bahawalpur. Historical facts show that in the beginning of the second century of Hijra, the name of the city was not Uch but Askandra (or Alexandria). According to a traditional estimate, Uch existed before the arrival of Bikarmjit when Jains and Buddhists ruled over the sub-continent. It is believed to be the town mentioned by Rashid-ud-Din as the capital of one of the principalities of Sind under Aynad, the son of Kafand, who ruled

after Alexander left the country (Auj, N. 1991). The present name of Uch was given to the town most probably sometime during the second half of the thirteen century A.D. Some historians state that Alexander came to Uch after conquering northern parts of India and spent over a fortnight in the city and renamed it Alexandria. Some researchers revealed Uch by the name of Sikandara or Iskalanda. It showed to be the most flourishing and beautiful town near the convergence of the Chenab and Ravi rivers (Ahmad, N. Z., 1997).

The Cholistan Forts

Cholistan proliferates in ancient forts and historical landmarks as well as impressive culture & architecture of Cholistan. Most of the forts have lost their original condition but still have some footprints of its presence. The detail of forts in Cholistan is as under:

WANJHROT FORT

Wanjhrot is an old and ancient fort, structurally an impressive and constructed with solid bricks. It was originally built by Wanjhia or Baija Bhayia in 757 A.D, but was reportedly demolished by Shahbudin Ghuri in A.D. 1167. Wanjhrot fort present condition is ruin but most of its original features survive. The outer strengthening is almost square with and on the whole length of 300 feet on each side, exclusive of the corner bastions which are 28 feet in diameter (Tahir, S., 1993).

MARROT FORT

Marot is a Sanskrit word meaning death. The ancient Marrot fort was situated near old river Hakra. It was founded by Raja Marrot the ruler of Chattr (Ahmad, N. Z., 1997). There was a time when Marrot was a commercial centre located ancient route between Multan and Delhi (Hasan, S. K., 2005).

PHULRA FORT

Raja Beeka constructed this fort. This fort was ruin in 1166 to 1751. Then Karram Khan that was the founder of Kaimpur, Hasilpur again re-constructed that fort. There is a well in the west side and deep 118 feet and width is 4 feet. Its water is clean and sweet and it is very strange that the water in Cholistan is sweet.

JAM GERH FORT

During 1203 /1788 Jam Khan Maronani constructed this fort. This is an attractive burnt-brick fort standing in the desert with much of its original appearance. This fort had in the way to go from Marrot to Meer Garh. There are four steeples in four corners.

MOJGARH FORT

Mojgarh fort was founded by Maroof Khan Kehrani in 1743, the completion of the fort was made by Jan Muhammad Khan the son of late Maroof khan. This fort is situated 18km away from Marrot fort in District Bahawalnagar.

BAHAWAL GERH FORT

Ameer Bahawal Khan II in 1791 A.D built Fort Bahawal Gerh. In 1870 it was founded 4 thousand cannon-balls with 4 kg weight on that place.

FATEH GERH FORT

Nawab Bahawal Khan II built and named this fort on Fateh Khan the father of Nawab Bahawal Khan. This fort had been in the custody of Arbani Daood Potras before the arrival of English Agency.

MEER GERH FORT

Noor Muhammad Khan founded this fort with seven long towers and a big door. This fort is located 16km in the south of PHULRA fort.

MUBARAKPUR FORT

Nawab Muhammad Mubarak Khan constructed this high fort to face the disturbance of Joyea, Lakwaira.

KAIMPUR FORT

In 1747 A.D, Kaim Khan Arbani constructed this fort. Sutluj River is followed in the north of Kaimpur town. There are still some sign of ruining fort.

KHAIR GERH FORT

Haji Khan built this fort which is 80 km from the south western of Bahawalpur. Now there are just ruins of this fort.

KHAN GERH FORT

Muhammad Bahawal Khan II constructed the Khan Gerh fort south western of 35km away from Drawar in 1198 A.D. This fort was constructed for defense purpose.

BAHAWALPUR FORT

This fort was constructed by Muhammad Bahawal Khan Abbasi in 1748 and also built up a city inside of fort and gave the name his own name Bahawal. There were six doors of fort. The names of doors are:

- Multan door
- Beeknair door (Fareed Gate)
- Darawar door
- Ahmadpori door
- Shikarpori door
- Bohr door

MARI FORT

The ancient one fort in the west of Darwar, specially it had kept political prisoners in that fort. The popularity of this fort was due to its length

LIARA FORT

This fort was founded by Sabzal Khan and was destroyed by flood in 1804 A.D. but there are no sign of Liara Fort this time.

MACHKI FORT

Machki fort was constructed by Lal Khan in 1777 A.D. The internal and external part of this fort was mud-brick. This fort is 30 km far away from Darawar.

DARAWAR FORT

This beautiful and most impressive fort was founded by Raja Deoraval. This is most ancient fort and situated at the west side of Hakra river and was said “Fort Deoraval” then it become Drawar fort. Sadiq Muhammad Khan I first Nawab of Bahawalpur captured this fort in 1733 A.D., then it was re-occupied by Rawal Rai Singh in A.D 1747 during the time of the second Nawab, Muhammad Bahawal Khan I, then transferred to the third Nawab, Mubarak Khan, twelve years later on the commitment of paying half the income of tolls collected at Darawar. A royal graveyard and a marble mosque stand conspicuously outside the fort. It has having forty towers, a well inside and a large tank outside, also a number of buildings intended to house the Nawab’s army and retiring quarters of the Royal family still stand deserted inside the fort, (Mughal, R. 1997).

ISLAMGARH FORT

It was founded by Rawal Bhim Singh in A.D 1608, originally named Bhimwar. One of the well outside the fort is 130 feet deep and 10 feet in diameter. Islamgarh fort is situated in the heart of the greater desert near the Indian border (Dar, S.Z., 2007).

The Cholistan Palaces

Noor Mahal

In the kingdom of Ameer Sir Sadiq Muhammad Khan IV started the construction of an impressive palace in the south of Bahawalpur. The grand deserts of the lands of mirage and miracles. A gorgeous palace was built like an Italian chateau on neoclassical lines, strangely at a time when modernism had set in. It has drawn inspirations from western and eastern architecture. The palace offers experience of royal living, priceless artifacts and antiques, landscaped gardens and spacious lawns. The cost of completion of this palace was 12 lacs. Built in 1872, there are diverse stories doing the rounds regarding its construction. According to one belief, Nawab Sadiq Muhammad Khan IV made the palace for his wife (Ali, Shahmat, 1848).

DARBAR MAHAL

This palace was constructed by Ameer Bahawal Khan V in 1899 to 1907. In the beginning its name was Mubarak palace. In some distance of the north-east of Bahawalpur, a beautiful, solid rampart was constructed. There are palaces inside of the rampart.

GULZAR MAHAL

This palace is also the best statue of art and architecture. The big door of this palace is situated in the south of Baghdad road. Ameer Muhammad Bahawal Khan gave the plan for the construction of this palace in his first year governance. Its construction were completed along with Darbar Mahal in 1905 A.D. Unfortunately the hope of Ameer Bahawal Khan living in this palace remain unfulfilled because he died the way returning from the Haj.

Sadiq Garh Palace

Sadiq Garh palace is located in the city of Dera Nawab Sahib and 40km south-west of Bahawalpur. It was constructed by Ameer Sadiq Muhammad Khan IV as his presidential palace. Its construction started 1882 to 1895 at a total cost of 2 million, under the supervision of a

British Political Agent. This palace is really eye-catching having most delicate paintings, collection of carpets from European and Asian countries.

Palace of Dera Nawab Sahib

The palaces of the Amirs are located mainly in Dera Nawab Sahib at a distance of 22 miles from Bahawalpur; while, Derawar was the ancestral seat of the rulers of Bahawalpur. It is the gateway to Cholistan, which comprises 1,000 square miles.

Nishat Mahal

Nishat Mahal is named of Nawab's wife, the Nishat Mahal is a double story building was constructed with high platform. The palace has five octagonal rooms. The palace building is square in plan, and constructed of burnt-brick. The four rooms have wooden doors and connected with veranda with a small room.

RANGEEL MAHAL

Rangeel Mahal was constructed by Fareed Khan II. It is reported that there were many residential parts of the palace and also a beautiful garden. The rooms were seems to be very impressive due to its attraction. The place was destroyed due to the fire stroke in the period of Rais Lal Khan.

FAREED MAHAL

Actually Fareed Mahal is situated in CHACHRAN SHRIF. This solid building was accomplished with airy and vast rooms, four walls. Now a days this building is under the control of endowment.

MAHAL JAMAL-UDIN WALI

This palace was the residence of Syed Ghulam Meeran Shah, this building have two stories and its construction look like, Noor Mahal Bahawalpur.

MAHAL GHARI IKHTIAR KHAN

Residence of Ikhtiar Khan was constructed like palaces but it has ruined/ destroyed with the passage of time (Mughal, 1997).

Local Language of Cholistan

The Saraiki language is an Indo-Aryan speech, and is spoken in Cholistan as well as in a large part of central Pakistan. It is no more a neglected language, once attributed to the camel-driving Jats and semi-nude Baloch tribes. Khwaja Ghulam Farid was a Sufi poet, who through his

mystical writings and poetry not only developed the language a lot, but also gave it a boost. The language suffered a great loss when the Saraiki-speaking Hindus migrated to India during the Partition, and were replaced by the Muslim refugees from there. However, the majority of them lived in the cities and a very few in the Greater Cholistan. During the Partition, they moved to the safety of the neighboring Hindu states of Bikaner and Jaisalmar (Khan, H.A. (2004).

The Cholistan Mosques

- JAMIA MASJID-UL-SADIQ
- JAMIA MASJID MACHLI BAZAR
- MASJID FIRDOS
- MASJID NOOR MAHAL
- MASJID MALOOK SHAH
- MASJID BHONG

There was a small mosque in the town Bhong, Tehsil Sadiqabad. Raees Ghazi (Late) set a plan to construct a beautiful mosque on the same bases. That was completed in forty year. The whole construction of the mosque was completed with marble. There is a pond near the mosque and a vast garden.

- JAMIA MASJID AHMEDPUR SHURKIA
- JAMIA MASJID FORT DARAWAR
- JAMIA MASJID FORT MARROT
- MASJID DARBAR MAHAL

Arts and Crafts of Cholistan

The painted villages and finest frescos on mud huts in Cholistan offer a treat for your eyes. Cholistani palaces and forts are heaven for art lovers and historians - they have amazing collections of antiques, paintings, armories, canons, and ancient jewelry and coins (Hasan, S. K., 2005).

Cholistani people rely largely on their livestock of sheep, goats, and camels. It is the main source of food and source of income is cattle breeding and its related businesses; that is how they meet their demand of milk, butter and animal fats. They create various artistic crafts such as

textiles, weaving, leatherwork, and pottery. Various kinds of khaddar (hand-woven cloth) are made for local consumption, and fine khaddar bedclothes and lungies (sarong) are woven here. A beautiful cloth called Sufi is also woven of silk and cotton, or with cotton wrap and silk wool. Gargas are made with numerous patterns and color, having complicated embroidery, mirror, and patchwork. Ajrak is another specialty of Cholistan is made here. It is a special and delicate printing technique on both sides of the cloth in indigo blue and red patterns covering the base cloth. Cotton turbans and shawls are also made here. Chunri is another form of dopattas (shawal), having innumerable colors and patterns like dots, squares, and circles on it (Wasti, Z.A., 1993).

Cholistani people make light and fine ceramic articles with mud surahies, piyalas, and glasses. The Cholistanis are fond of jewellery. Cholistan has attractive traditional silver jewelry, embroidered chappals (shoes), rugs, and dresses. The ladies wear rings, Nath (Nose Pin), Katmala (necklace) Kangan (bracelet), Pazeab (anklets), and Chandanhar etc. Enamel works, and it is done by natives on buttons, earrings, bangles, and rings etc. Camels are not only useful for transportation and loading purposes, but its skin and wool are also quite useful. Beautiful woolen blankets known as falsies and stylish and durable rugs are made by camel wool. (South Asian Studies (2006)). Cholistan Desert Jeep Rally is a famous event of the area. This is the biggest jeep rally event in Pakistan (Khan, H.A. (2004)).

Suggestions

Role of Libraries, Information Centers, Archives and Museums in promoting Cholistani Culture and Architecture

Extensive discussion with library science specialists, researchers and educationists suggests the following measure for libraries, Information Centers and Museums in promoting Cholistani Culture and Architecture.

- The university libraries of South Punjab should organize talks, lectures, seminars, conferences addressing the issues relating to development and preservation of rich heritage of Cholistan Desert.

- By organizing above-mentioned programme public libraries and museums may also motivate the higher authorities for renovating or repairing mosques, places, forts and shrines in Cholistan.
- Inclusion of Cholistani community is very important for making any developmental plan meaningful and successful.
- University and public libraries and museum should arrange exhibitions, displays and book fairs highlighting the colorful and fabulous culture and architecture of Cholistan. This could be the best way of encouraging tourist for visiting such historical places that would result in the social and economic betterment of the area.
- National library, PLA and HEC, digitization centers, documentation and survey centers should be established for digitizing the manuscripts, archive, culture and architecture of Cholistan. These organisations should recommend higher authorities to arrange trade fair in the big cities (not only at national also international level) for promoting local, regional arts, crafts and jewelry.
- Grant must be provided for research activities in different aspects of Cholistani Culture including Tribal Folks, Art, Culture, loriyan (folk songs) and old songs. HEC and Punjab government should provide special funds to libraries to support endangered art and culture like Chunri, khusa, paintings, weaving, the famous puppet show of Cholistan, folk songs of Darawar and cultural theatre.
- New technologies like You-Tube, social networking sites, Facebook, and Web 2.0. etc may be used for public awareness about Cholistani culture and architecture.

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